

Ambassador's Special Self-Help (SSH) Program

SNAPSHOT

Lessons Learned Outside the Classroom in the School Garden

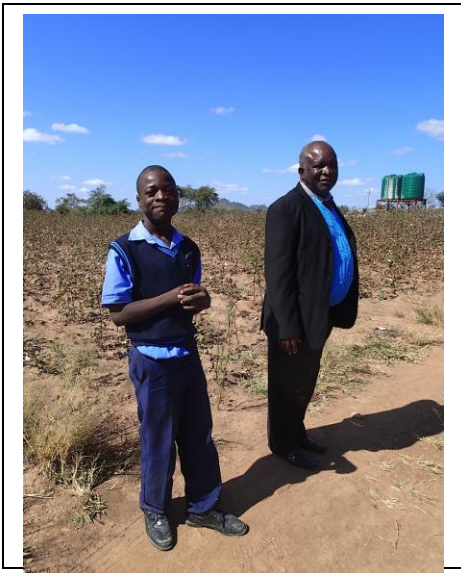


Photo: SSH Program

Edson, a 13-year old orphan, was elected chairman of the Tabidurira gardening club and helped energize his friends to plant tomatoes, rape, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, and maize.

The SSH Program awards grants to non-governmental, non-profit, or community-based organizations registered for at least one year to implement short-term (12-month), small-scale development projects that include significant community involvement.

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Tabidurira Secondary School, located in the far south of Zimbabwe, was established in 1994. With 654 students, 240 of whom are orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), almost half the student population struggles to pay the \$30 school fees per term.

To raise money to pay fees, the OVCs formed a garden club to sell produce to the local community. However, they encountered a problem. Their garden was uphill at the other end of campus from their water well, making it difficult to maintain the garden.

In 2013, the SSH program provided \$15,000 to dig trenches from the well, lay pipes, purchase two 5,000-liter water tanks, and install eight water points around the schoolyard and garden. Halfway through the grant, the SSH team awarded \$5,000 in extra funding to purchase fencing, tools, and materials to further revive their market garden.

Headmaster Mukwena said that the first year of gardening brought only \$60 in profit. To overcome frequent power cuts affecting the water pumps and excessive rains drowning many of their crops last year, the club learned some valuable lessons and improved the garden drainage system as well as planted higher value crops to help increase profits. Anticipating \$250 in profit in 2015, the school will pay for uniforms, supplies, school fees, and food assistance for their most vulnerable students. Mr. Mukwena said, "It is so hot and dry during the spring and summer here... everyone is so happy to have water taps around the school. We never dreamt we would have this. We are so thankful for the U.S. Embassy grant."

The school plans to seek additional markets for their produce and is also experimenting with other entrepreneurial income generating schemes, like a small shop at the school that sells snacks, drinks, and sundries.